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ABSTRACT

Thailand's Chulalongkorn University Language Institute has established two series of in-service education courses for teachers of English as a second language. The courses were designed to respond to the teachers' expressed interest in the preparation of materials and improvement of specific teaching techniques, and to be based on activities in the teachers' own classrooms. The two series addressed general teaching methodology and specific classroom techniques separately. Reluctance to have classes observed and the importance of seniority in the Thai culture were sociocultural factors to be considered in designing the courses. The courses were structured to promote small-group teacher interaction and cooperation in an informal atmosphere. Participants took turns having their classes videotaped. The teacher and trainers edited the tape together and prepared a class discussion to be led by the teacher. Participants found the program beneficial, and felt it improved their confidence and preparation for evaluation. The videotapes have been made available as resources to other teachers. A model for the development of other in-service programs has been created from the experience in these courses. (MSE)

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NON-FORMAL CLASS-BASED STAFF DEVELOPMENT: A PILOT PROJECT IN THAILAND
Naraporn Chan-Ocha and Suchada Nimmannit

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In teaching skill-oriented courses such as those involving the English language, the teacher's performance in the classroom and the learning that takes place are of primary importance. It is with this in mind, therefore, that Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI), since 1981, has organized a series of class-based in-service staff development courses. These were arranged in two series: Series 1 concentrated on general teaching methodology, while series 2 emphasized specific classroom techniques. These courses were conducted under the auspices of the British Council who graciously loaned the Institute a number of its Key English Language Teaching (KELT) officers. This state of affairs continued until 1985, at which juncture the Thai members of the Staff Development Unit (SD.Unit) assumed responsibility for the courses following the withdrawal of KELT officers due to budgetary constraints.

NEEDS

Given that most CULI teachers had already taken in-service courses in general teaching methodology, they expressed a profound interest-- according to the survey conducted by the SD.Unit (1985)¹--in the following interrelated professional skills: the preparation of teaching materials and the improvement of teaching techniques. (Both are inseparable from the point of view of classroom teaching practice.) They also expressed a preference for programmes consisting of workshops and sessions spent reviewing video recordings both of their own classes as well as those of their colleagues.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

Despite the profound interest in the areas mentioned, the report on the KELT officer's Series 2 In-Service Staff Development Courses (1984)² also revealed that participants had more reservations about

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having their classes observed than they did about having them videotaped and reviewed by their colleagues later. In addition experience suggested that participants felt even more uncomfortable in having other teachers, particularly those SD.Unit members acting as trainers, discuss their classes.

One other socio-cultural factor, however, needs to be taken into consideration with regard to the choice of trainers. In countries such as Thailand in which seniority still plays an important role, potential trainers need to be respected not only for their ability but for their seniority in terms of age and academic rank. The SD.Unit members who had worked closely with the KELT officers in classroom teaching experiments, though well versed in teaching methodology and already trained in the U.K., are relatively young and belong to the middle echelon of the academic hierarchy. It will be counterproductive to have them assume the role of trainer in the same way as an expert from overseas might.

Thus, what was needed was a kind of staff development programme in which all the teachers would get together to assist one another in improving the performance of each individual member.

TIME FACTOR

Given the fact that most teachers have a teaching load of 10-12 hours a week with at least 10 additional hours needed for lesson planning and grading students' work, they do not have much time left. Thus, the programme should not take up more than 4-5 hours a week.

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Based upon the above considerations with regard to participants' needs, socio-cultural factors and the time factor, two non-formal class-based staff development programmes were conducted in 1985 and 1986 lasting ten weeks each.

The structure of the programmes was based on that of the KELT officer's Series 2 In-Service Staff Development Courses (1984)³. This was to constitute a type of in-service training programme to be run by Thai teachers themselves. To counteract teachers' reservations with regard to classroom observation, the classes were videotaped. The number of participants in each programme was limited to a maximum of four or five so that the discussion would take place in an informal atmosphere. It has also been noticed that the smaller the group, the more relaxed and cooperative the members proved to be. In addition, the participants in each programme were involved in teaching the same course so they shared a similar background which was useful when it came to videotaping classes and discussing the results.

The participants took turns in having their one-hour classes videotaped. Before videotaping, each participant discussed the lesson plan with one of the SD.Unit members so that she could later direct the cameraman and the sound engineer accordingly. After the recording, the SD.Unit members and the participant whose class was videotaped viewed the tape and helped select those clips which contained interesting points. In addition, they outlined the viewing guide and planned the discussion stage while the participant herself later led the two-hour discussion session. The participants were entitled to censor any particular part of the tape of their classes they did not want to be viewed in public. The topics for discussion were derived from the participants' interests as well as from a number of interesting points on techniques and materials that emerged from viewing the video clips. Any comments or criticisms that could be construed as 'personal' were studiously avoided. After the first few-weeks, most participants became more actively involved in the discussion stage and provided constructive comments either on the teaching methodology or on the materials they had tried out in class.

Maintaining a low profile, the SD. Unit members outlined the programme, produced the videotapes, worked out the viewing guides for the discussion sessions in detail, and participated in the discussions as trainees. The responsibility was allocated to each participant for leading the discussion session with the help of the SD. Unit members, who offered guidance in as unobtrusive a manner as possible.

BENEFITS

An evaluation of both programmes revealed that participants found the programmes beneficial in providing them with valuable teaching experience with a variety of teaching techniques. In addition, the programmes left them more confident and better prepared for the evaluation process that Thai teacher seeking promotion must undergo. Another advantage was that the video recordings provided valuable insights into the relative strengths and weaknesses of the teaching materials on which subsequent revision of the materials is based. These recordings have now been developed to form self-access video modules which are available to other teachers for use as resource materials.

PROPOSED MODEL

From the information gathered during these two programmes, we have come to the conclusion that if programmes of this nature are to be successful, they need to be organized in a rather non-formal way whereby all participants assume equal roles and responsibilities. Working in small groups, participants will be engaged in planning, teaching, preparing a viewing guide and participating in discussions. The organizers, i.e. the SD. Unit members, take a supporting role, acting merely as facilitators who provide guidance and assistance when necessary. In order to clarify the various stages in a programme of this nature, therefore, the following model has been proposed.

CHART 1

The Proposed Model : An Overview

Week	Prepare plan	Teach lesson	Have class videotaped	Preview videotape	Prepare viewing guide	Lead discussion
1	Pt 1	Pt 1	Pt 1	Pt 1 Pt 2	Pt 1 Pt 2	Pt 1 Pt 2
2	Pt 2	Pt 2	Pt 2	Pt 2 Pt 3	Pt 2 Pt 3	Pt 2 Pt 3
3	Pt 3	Pt 3	Pt 3	Pt 3 Pt 4	Pt 3 Pt 4	Pt 3 Pt 4
4	Pt 4	Pt 4	Pt 4	Pt 4 Pt 1	Pt 4 Pt 1	Pt 4 Pt 1

NB. Pt = participant

CHART 2

The Programme : A Weekly Schedule

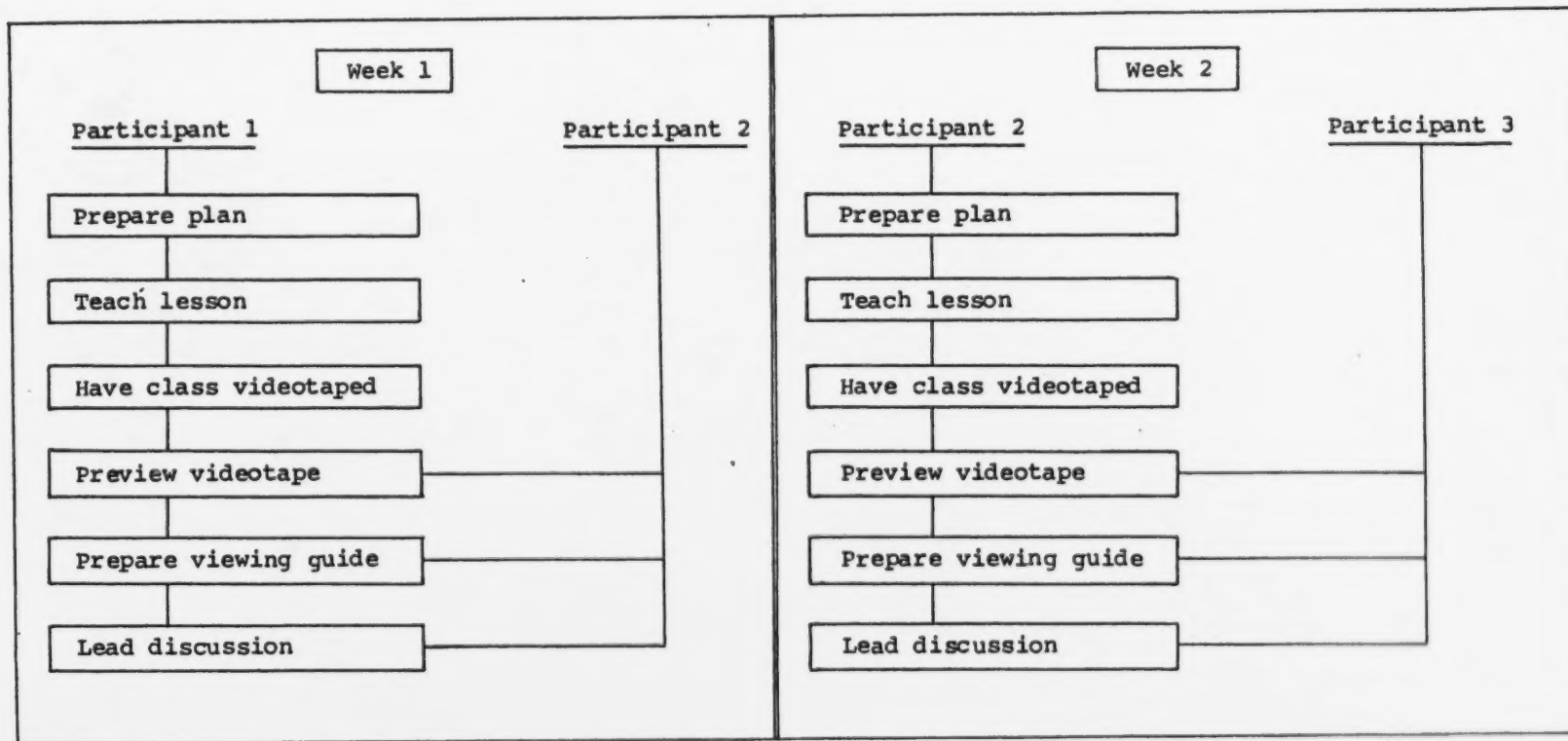


Chart 1 shows an overview of the proposed programme while Chart 2 shows the responsibilities of each participant in each week. According to the first and second weeks schedule as shown in Chart 2, participants 1 and 2 take the lead while other participants assume a minor role. During the first week, participant 1 prepares a lesson plan and then proceeds to teach the lesson, which will be videotaped. Then, he will preview the videotape and prepare the viewing guide together with participant 2. This viewing guide will set forth guidelines for the subsequent discussion session. Both participants will take charge of the proceedings while the other participants will contribute their own ideas on the points under discussion.

The schedule for the second week follows the same pattern. Participant 2, in turn, will go through the same stages as participant 1 did during the previous week. However, this time he is helped by participant 3 in previewing and drawing up the viewing guide. The two of them will then take the lead in the discussion session that follows. For the rest of the programme, the other participants alternate in taking the leading role as shown in Chart 1. The participants, however, may call upon members of the Staff Development Unit for assistance at all times.

One of the main advantages of this proposed model is that it is self-contained, thus allowing for flexibility in terms of the number of participants. The leading role assumed by participants 1 and 2 can be taken over jointly by a group of either two or three participants. However, one should bear in mind that the smaller the number of the participants, the more informal and productive the programme will be. Furthermore, alternating responsibility in this way allows everybody to assume an equal role and at the same time enhances the spirit of cooperation among participants. The most important advantage is that this minimizes the constraints placed upon the participants and obviates the stress of being evaluated by trainers. By virtue of the relaxed atmosphere in this programme

and the spirit of cooperation that it fosters, participants are able to pool their experience and create new ideas that will enable them to upgrade their professional skills.

CONCLUSION

Though a great deal of experimentation still needs to be carried out concerning this type of non-formal class-based staff development programme, we feel that such a programme is of immense value, in that it is applicable not only to language teachers but to teachers in any discipline. Given the support of the relevant administrative body, any institution could easily adapt a scheme of this nature in order to conduct an on-going staff development programme of its own, the ultimate aim of which would be not only to improve the quality of one's teaching materials, but also to upgrade the efficiency of one's staff in terms of teaching performance.

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1. Survey on CULI Staff's Interest in Staff Development, Staff Development Unit, Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, Unpublished Report, 1985.
2. Report on Series 2 In-Service Staff Development Course (13 August - 7 September 1984), John Laycock, 1984
3. John Laycock, a KELT officer at CULI from 1982-1985 conducted Series 2 In-Service Staff Development Courses with the SD. Unit members as counterparts. Each course structure can be described as follows:

Working group: KELT officer + SD. Unit members
Participants: 8--teaching different courses
Length of course: 4 weeks
Discussion sessions: 16 hours (2 hours each)
Teaching sessions: 8 Hours (1 hour each)

WEEK 1

Lesson planning 1 (1 hour)

participant # 1 + 1 SD. unit member

Teaching session 1 (1 hour)

participant # 1 + 1 SD. unit member + 2 technicians

Previewing session 1 (2 hours)

participant # 1 + KELT officer + all SD. unit members

Discussion session 1 (2 hours)

all participants + KELT officer (leading the discussion) +
all SD. unit members

Lesson planning 2 (1 hour)

participant # 2 + 1 SD. unit member

Teaching session 2 (1 hour)

participant # 2 + 1 SD. unit member + 2 technicians

Previewing session 2 (2 hours)

participant # 2 + KELT officer + all SD. unit members

Discussion session 2 (2 hours)

all participants + KELT officer (leading the discussion) +
all SD. unit members

Weeks 2, 3 and 4 work on the same schedule with other 6 participants.